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402.1 Purpose

- A. An interview is a structured communication for the purpose of gathering necessary customer information to assist in determining eligibility. This section describes the interview requirement, the ways in which the requirement may be met, and the basic content of the interview.
- B. Local departments must establish procedures following these guidelines to ensure accurate and timely service to all households, including special needs households such as elderly, disabled, homeless, working household members and households that contain members who are not proficient in English. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other laws require that we provide reasonable accommodations and program modifications to people with disabilities and language difficulties so that they have equal access to all programs.

402.2 Interview

- A. With the introduction ten years ago of DHR's online application SAIL, and the subsequent launch of myDHR and the Maryland Health Connection, applicants no longer have to come into the Department of Social Services to apply for our benefits. For this reason, face-to-face interviews are no longer the norm, and telephone interviews have taken their place. In the Food Supplement Program, interviews are required once a year for most recipients, and these interviews can take place on the telephone.
- B. Except for households certified for longer than 12 months, households must have an interview with a case manager at initial certification and once every 12 months thereafter. Face-to-face interviews are no longer required at application and recertification. Local departments should use telephone interviews as much as possible, not just for hardship cases but for all cases.

C. Telephone Interviewing Tips

- 1. An interview's success depends on the skill of the interviewer and the rapport that develops between the interviewer and the customer.
- 2. Plan the telephone interview. It requires preparation.
 - a. Get organized
 - b. Decide the objective of the call
 - What is it you need to know?
 - Why are you calling the customer?

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402.2 Interview (continued)

- c. Familiarize yourself with relevant past and current information
- d. Write down all information needed
- e. Gather complete and accurate information

3. During the interview

- a. Confirm your understanding of the circumstances
 - Ask questions until you are clear on all issues,
 - Request that the customer repeat them back to you.
- b. Use a good closing statement to prevent unnecessary and time-consuming phone calls to and from customers.

Examples: “Is there anything else you need to tell me before we hang up?”

“Do you have any questions for me?”

“Do you know what information you need to send/bring in?”

“Do you understand all that we talked about?”

- D. The individual interviewed may be any responsible member of the household or an authorized representative. The local department must inform the household that the household will be held liable for any over issuance resulting from erroneous information given by the household member or authorized representative.
- E. The interview normally takes place on the telephone or in the local department or other certification site but may be at another mutually acceptable location, including the household’s residence. (See Section 402.3 for home visit requirements.)
- F. The site of the interview must be arranged to preserve the privacy and confidentiality of the interview.

402.3 Home Visits

- A. The face-to-face interview may be conducted at the household’s home if it is the reasonable accommodation that best meets a customer’s needs.
- B. The **date and time of the home visit must be scheduled in advance** with the household. This can be done either by telephone or letter.

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402.4 Waiver of Face-to-Face Interview

- A. While telephone interviews are the norm and are available to all applicants and recipients, there are instances where the local department **must** waive the face-to-face interview because of hardship situations.
- B. These hardship situations include, but are not limited to:
 - 1. Illness or disability,
 - 2. Transportation difficulties,
 - 3. Residency in a rural area,
 - 4. Care of a household member,
 - 5. Prolonged severe weather, or
 - 6. **Work or training hours that prevent a household from participating in a face-to-face interview.**
- C. There is no requirement to verify the hardship situation.
- D. In hardship situations the case manager **must** waive the face-to-face interview at both application and recertification.

For Payment Accuracy: If you grant a waiver of the face-to-face interview, you must complete a telephone interview with a responsible household member or authorized representative prior to finalizing a case.

- E. Be sure to narrate the case file to document when a household was granted a waiver of the face-to-face interview because of a hardship situation.
- F. The waiver of the face-to-face interview must not affect the length of the certification period assigned.
- G. The waiver of the face-to-face interview does not exempt the household from verification requirements.

402.5 Content of the Interview

The purpose of the interview is to acquaint the household with certain aspects of the Food Supplement Program (FSP) and to help the case manager determine the household's eligibility.

- A. The interview must be conducted as an official and confidential discussion.
- B. The applicant should be made to feel at ease and the right to privacy maintained.

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402.5 Content of the Interview (continued)

- C. The scope of the interview may not extend beyond the examination of the household's circumstances directly relating to the determination of the household's eligibility and basis of issuance.
- D. The household may bring anyone it chooses to the interview.
- E. In order to accomplish its purpose, during the interview the local department will:
 - 1. Advise the applicant of the household's rights and responsibilities. (Include privacy rights, the right to review the case record, the right to a fair hearing, the responsibility to cooperate and the responsibility to report changes.)
 - 2. Review the information provided by the applicant to ensure it is complete and accurate.
 - 3. Assist the applicant to complete the necessary forms associated with the interview process.
 - 4. Resolve any unclear or inconsistent information with the applicant.
 - 5. Request any verification necessary beyond that, which is provided by the applicant at the interview.
 - 6. Advise the household that failure to report or verify the following expenses is considered a statement by the household that it chooses not to receive a deduction for the unreported or unverified expense:
 - (a) Dependent care expenses;
 - (b) Shelter expenses for a homeless household in excess of the allowance;
 - (c) Medical expenses for persons age 60 or older or with a disability; or
 - (d) Child Support payments.

NOTE: The language in 402.5 (6) above appears on the CARES system-generated Eligibility Determination Document (EDD) and the Rights and Responsibilities Form (9707).

- 7. Advise the applicant of Electronic Benefit Transfer System (EBTS) procedures. (This information may be provided to the applicant by a volunteer or another employee.)
- 8. Advise the customer they may apply for more than one program at the same time or they may file a separate Food Supplement Program application.

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402.5 Content of the Interview (continued)

9. Advise the customer that time limits or other requirements that apply to the receipt of TCA do not apply to FSP benefits and if the TCA is closed because the customer has reached the maximum time limit, the customer may still be eligible for FSP benefits.
10. Advise the customer that receiving FSP does not affect the TCA time limit.
11. At the end of an interactive office interview give the customer the opportunity to review the eligibility determination document (EDD) prior to signing it and provide a copy for the customer. (For further clarification of the application process, please see Section 400 of this manual.)

REMINDER: Do not deny or terminate FSP applications because the customer failed or refused to comply with a requirement of another program.

402.6 Scheduling Interviews and the Notice of Missed Interview

- A. The local department:
 1. Must schedule all interviews as promptly as possible to ensure that timeliness standards are met.
 2. Should allow a minimum of 10 days to allow the customer to return any required verification.
- B. If the customer does not appear for the in-office interview or is not available for the telephone interview, the local department must notify the household that it missed the appointment and that the household is responsible for rescheduling the appointment.
- C. If the household requests a second interview, the local department must schedule one.
- D. **Applicants who come into the local department and cannot be seen the same day must be given an appointment with a specific date and time that the customer will be seen or telephoned for an interview.**
- E. If the screening process indicates the household meets expedited criteria, the local department must make every effort to interview the household that day if the customer is in the office. If the customer is not in the office, then the local

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402.6 Scheduling Interviews and the Notice of Missed Interview (continued)

department must attempt to hold a telephone interview the day of the application or schedule the interview so that the household has access to FSP benefits within the expedited time frame. If neither the in-person or telephone interview can be accomplished, the local department waives the interview requirement and processes the expedited application. See Section 401.6 of this manual for details and further requirements.

- F. When scheduling an interview on CARES for a household that dropped off or mailed in an application, the local department must take into consideration the mailing time for getting the scheduled interview notice to the customer. Mailing time may add up to three days to the application processing time.
- G. Enter a **T** in the Interview Method field on CARES to indicate the appointment is for a telephone interview

Reminder: The case manager should offer a telephone interview to any applicant or recipient. A telephone interview can help local departments meet application timeliness requirements.

402.7 Felony Drug Conviction and Substance Abuse Testing

402.71 Background

An Individual receiving FSP benefits who is convicted after July 1, 2000 of a drug related felony involving the manufacture, distribution, or possession with the intent to distribute a controlled dangerous substance is:

1. Ineligible for FSP for one year from the date of conviction, and
2. Is subject to testing and treatment for substance abuse for a period of two years starting from the later of the date when the custodial parent is:
 - (a) Released from incarceration,
 - (b) Completes any term of probation,
 - (c) Completes any term of parole and mandatory supervision.

402.72 The Role of the Case Manager

- A. For FSP applicants or participants who have been convicted of a drug related felony after July 1, 2000, the case manager must:
 1. Complete the interview and the related application or redetermination procedures.

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402.71 The Role of the Case Manager (continued)

2. Review the Rights and Responsibility Form (DHR/FIA CARES 9707) with the applicant and obtain his signature.
 3. **Determine** if an individual in the household has been convicted of a drug-related felony.
 4. Inform the individual who has been convicted of a drug related felony that to receive benefits he or she must be screened by the addictions specialist and referred for a drug test.
 5. Inform the customer who has been convicted of a drug related felony of mandatory compliance with the Family Investment Program's Substance Abuse Treatment and Services Program (SATS).
 6. Refer the individual convicted of a drug-related felony to the addictions specialist for screening and drug testing.
 7. Complete a Substance Abuse Screening Referral (DHR/FIA 1177) form.
Write "**convicted drug felon**" in the top portion of the form next to the zip code.
- B. The addictions specialist returns the form within 10 days advising whether the customer is in compliance.

402.72 Compliance

- A. The addictions specialist advises the case manager of the action being taken with the customer for comprehensive assessment and drug testing and whether the customer is in compliance.
- B. Customers are in compliance if the customer:
1. Completed the drug test.
 2. Is awaiting availability of a treatment facility.
 3. Is enrolled in a treatment program.
 4. Has successfully completed a treatment program or was referred to a new program, or
 5. The results of the comprehensive assessment indicate no need for treatment.
- C. Customers are always work registered unless they are otherwise exempt from work registration requirements. Refer to Section 130 of the FSP manual to determine the individual's status.

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402.72 Compliance (continued)

- D. Individuals who have a felony drug conviction **are not** entitled to a 30-day conciliation period.
- E. Send the adverse action notice and allow adverse action time before removing the individual convicted of a drug-related felony from the household.